BEST SELLERS

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Upton Sinclair. Between Two Worlds. Viking. March 21, 1941. 805 p. $3.00

It is difficult to classify Upton Sinclair's latest opus Between Two Worlds. Lanny Budd, whose earlier life was chronicled in World's End, is again the central figure and the book carries on with his story from post-war 1919 until the great Wall Street crash of October 1929.

Lanny, the illegitimate son of Robbie Budd, U.S. munitions salesman, and Beauty Budd, Robbie's expatriate former mistress, was born and reared, save for a short interlude, on the Riviera. Through his father and mother he met not only the socially prominent but also the great men and leaders of all nations. As the story begins Lanny has just finished work as a secretary at the Paris Peace Conference, and in a state of disillusionment has retired to Bienvenu, his mother's estate on the Riviera.

His mother's husband, Marcel Detaze, was killed in the war and she takes as a lover one of Lanny's childhood friends, Kurt Meissner, a German musician embittered by his country's degradation. Lanny induces Rick Pomeroy-Nielson, a boyhood friend of both and crippled in the war, to bring his wife and children to Bienvenu where he hopes to achieve a new symbolic peace based on their mutual love for art and literature. To this menagerie Lanny adds Marie de Bruyne, with the consent of her husband, as his own paramour. Life at Bienvenu is unconventional and is based entirely on beauty and harmony with a faintly half-hearted search for some sort of underlying truth thrown in.

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The story then carries on through Marie's death, the acquisition of Countess Rosemary as a second mistress and finally Lanny's marriage to Irma Barnes, an American heiress. Included are sidelights on a half-dozen international conferences between the European nations, stressing the greed and dishonesty of European diplomacy, the career of Zaharoff, the international oil-game, Beauty's conversion to New Thought religions and spiritualism, the life of the rich, the rise of Fascism and Nazism, the contest of Socialism and Communism, Lanny's achievement of financial independence from his father through becoming a dealer in "objets d'art" and a plethora of other incidents far too numerous to mention here.

Upton Sinclair can write. He does so easily and for the most part readably. He undoubtedly feels that he has some sort of message for his readers. What that message may be is another matter. To a large measure Lanny Budd is reminiscent of Studs Lonigan. Like Studs his whole life was valueless and unproductive but for the brutal realism of Farrell Sinclair substitutes an environment of ultra-refinement. If showing the futility of Lanny's type of life be Sinclair's message then the book may have some value in spite of its obvious shortcomings. If, on the other hand, the book be an attempt to show the mismanagement and misgovernment of Europe then the task has long since been done by far abler hands. To this reviewer however, Sinclair's thesis seems to be that of liberal humanism as a panacea for human ills.

Sinclair uses both Rick and Lanny to show an idealistic pity for the down-trodden masses and throughout the book he uses Lanny to question the value of the capitalist system. Lanny's concept of the ideal world is based entirely on the idea that physical welfare for all, harmonious relations between people, beauty in art and literature and openmindedness to all ideas are the most important things in life. The book suffers from all the defects of a humanistic philosophy. Man being self-sufficient God, of course, is unnecessary, physical welfare is dominant and moral codes are what you make them.

Objectionable incidents and passages abound throughout the book. Religion is seen as only a series of taboos, license is misnamed freedom, and premarital non-celibacy is upheld as desirable. There are several unjustifiable references to Catholicity and Catholic practices of which the following quotation is a fair example: "He was one of those sex-tormented beings which the Catholic religion produces in great numbers." (p.148) In addition the multiplicity of "affaires d'amour" indicates quite clearly the author's attitude on sex and love. In fact the book might be considered as a text on the pseudo-psychology of love since it abounds in helpful suggestions and hints on how to choose, woo and win a mistress. The book is not recommended.

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W. Somerset Maugham. Up At The Villa. Doubleday, Doran. 1941. 209p. $1.75

The author of the classic Of Human Bondage here presents a short novel a out a beautiful young English widow and three men during three days somewhere near Florence. Mary Panton, thirty, receives a proposal from her lifelong admirer, "empire-builder" Edgar Swift, fifty-four, just made governor of Bengal. She promises her answer in three days. In the meanwhile, at a party, Rowley Flint, thirty-one, twice-divorced, interesting "idler and rotter", despairing of

seduction, also proposes. Firmly rejecting him, she adds that, rather than give herself to such as he, she would give herself to some poor man to give such a one a brief hour of happiness.

The violinist at the party, a sad and unfortunate young Austrian refugee, proves such a man. She gives herself to him for an hour. But when she wants the affair to end with that hour, he, crying bitterly, "I took you for a goddess and you're just a whore" (p.95, The only strong word in the book), shoots himself with her revolver.

In terror she calls Rowley. They drive the body to a lonely road and drop it in a copse. Against Rowley's advice, she tells Edgar about the affair. Edgar, distressed, nevertheless, says that, though it means his giving up the governorship, he will marry her anyhow and retire. To spare him from chivalrously ruining his career, she jilts him. Rowley, then, though she offers herself as his mistress, insists on marrying her and she accepts.

The novel is interesting. Excellent craftsmanship produces plausability and suspense. Otherwise the style is without distinction. But there are no improprieties of language. The sinful incidents are alluded to rather than described.

The secondary and subordinated impressions of the novel are bad. Divorce is taken for granted. An idler and a rotter is made a loveable scamp--an old English fictional tradition. His sex jealousy is made more noble than Edgar's concern for Mary's purity. The whole spirit is pagan and amoral, as unfortunately in so many best-sellers. It is the fear of scandal, not Mary's fall from purity, that causes Edgar's hesitation.

But the central impression of the book is that a woman can't do anybody any good by sacrificing her purity. Since this is the predominating and of course wholesome impression, the book can be expected to do more good than harm. On that basis it can be recommended to adults and to college students, and need not be kept from high school students.

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Harvey Smith. The Gang's All Here. Princeton. April 7, 1941.

The Gang's All Here is a collection of sketches of college alumni showing their post-graduation careers. Harvey Smith writes his book as the class secretary preparing a directory for the 25th reunion but instead of mere facts and figures decides to tell the inside story of each. As a result we see a varied group of individuals in all walks of life from senators to W.P.A. workers, successful and unsuccessful either because of or in spite of their college careers.

Old Nostalgia, the alma mater is one of our more sacrosanct institutions of higher learning with all the typical appendages of college life. The scholastic side is scarcely mentioned and the author spends most of his time poking mild fun at such collegiate items as athletics, drinking, exclusive fraternities, stuffed shirts, alumni associations and, to a certain extent, the administration and faculty.

Contrary to expectation very little sex enters into the story and that little entirely along sophisticated lines. It is stressed only in the episode of Bert Normone, who has spent his life knocking about in the standard exotic corners of the world acquiring a collection of supercolossal native wives and thus becoming the envy of the rest of the class.

The book can be recommended as amusing reading for those acquainted with the type of college where "spirit" is the primary objective. They should derive much quiet amusement from the author's comments. For all other readers the book seems rather tiresome and pointless.

*****

Winston S. Churchill. Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Putnam. April 14, 1941. $3.00

As a sequel to While England Slept, the collected speeches of Mr. Winston S. Churchill dealing with national defense and foreign affairs from 1932 to 1938, Randolph Churchill, his son, has, with the compilation of the present volume brought the collection down to date. Beginning more than a year before the outbreak of the present war, the work opens with Mr. Churchill's vehement protest against the surrender to the Eire government of the treaty ports, and tracing the sanguinary concatenation of events from Munich to the "Battle of the Atlantic", terminates with a note of determination to persist in the struggle to the end. Before his inclusion in the government, Mr. Churchill, realizing--and seemingly he alone realizes it at the time--that England's insularity no longer renders her immune to invasion, urges the acceleration of rearmament, in order to secure mastery in the air as well as at sea. To implement the program, through the expeditious procurement of munitions by a centralized agency, he advocates the creation of a Ministry of Supply. Referring to the Munich agreement as a "total and unmitigated defeat", which would destroy the confidence of the small nations of Europe in England and France, he urges, while there is yet time, the formation of a democratic league for collective security--"a league of armed people too faithful to molest others, too strong to be molested themselves".

As First Lord of the Admiralty and, later, as Prime Minister he endeavors to create national unity through the inclusion in his War Cabinet of representatives of all major parties--Conservative, Labor, and Liberal--and through a series of speeches intended to appraise the nation of the gravity of the emergency and of the means which must necessarily be adopted to meet it. Most noteworthy of these latter efforts is the speech broadcast, June 18, 1941, the day after Marshal Petain sued for peace: "...I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilation. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink onto the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties,

and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour".

In view of these exertions, it is but reasonable to conclude the Prime Minister to be motivated by a series of ultimate war aims, which he desires to be achieved. Unfortunately he has not deigned to expressly state these aims. Notwithstanding this, it is still possible for the reader to envisage in general outline the order he will establish, if the choice be alloted to him. That this will be erected on a democratic framework is certain, for to him the idea of the individual as a "soulless fraction" of the state is repugnant. Conceiving, as he does, civilization to be dependent on the subordination of the ruling authority to the will of the people, he asserts the achievement of international harmony to be possible only through the collective efforts of all nations in the establishment of a rule of law for all, a rule supplemented by instruments of force to compel adherence.

Finally, the work in general is in the highest Churchill tradition, distinguished by the brilliant prose for which the author is so justly famous and marked by his genius for analysis and his talent for perceiving and facing facts. As a record of crisis government in a democracy it is a valuable contribution to the field of historical literature. And as a presentation of England's case it is a clear-cut statement by him to whom the nation turned in its hour of peril. I unhesitatingly recommend the work to all interested in the preservation of the democratic way of life.

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Harvey O'Connor. The Astors. Knopf. April 14, 1941. 488 p. $3.75

The history of American families has been written by many authors but seldom has a more interesting and revealing book been presented than in Harvey O'Connor's The Astors.

John Jacob Astor, the founder of the clan came to the United States in 1783. He was born at Waldorf, near Heidelberg, Germany in 1763. Astor acquired a fortune by trading with the Indians for furs. He established Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia river and invested in real estate in New York City.

This book is not only a history of the Astor family but it is a worthwhile social history of New York City. The only philanthropy that may be attached to the name of old John Jacob Astor is the Astor library--eventually taken over by the City of New York.

The whole Astor clan--some good, some bad and all lacking in charitable instincts are herein pictured. Mr. O'Connor continually mentions the lack of charity exhibited by the Astor family.

The Astor riches were built around the slums of New York City. There were Astor houses, tenements, warehouses and business establishments to be found--from Avenue A to Eleventh and from 3rd Street to 185th. On the named streets Astor property could be found on Amsterdam, Bleecker, Barclay, Houston, King, Hasson, Pearl, Pine, Vesey, Worth, and others too numerous to mention. The chapters dealing with the

slums of New York-Astor property are classic in their graphic presentation of social evils and the Astor estate's failure to improve tenement house conditions.

Society and the 'Four Hundred' came into existence under the cold supervision of Mrs. William Astor nee Caroline Webster Schermerhorn (1831-1908).

She became the unchallenged queen of American society in the period after the Civil War. Socially ambitious Mrs. Astor brought Ward McAllister to New York to act as her major domo and social minister without portfolio. McAllister hailed from South Carolina. He had a taste for the proper niceties and checked on those who were to march across the Astor door step.

Mrs. Astor never accepted the Goulds. J.P. Morgan and John P Rockefeller,, rising financial wizards never even knocked at the Astor door. The Astor money and McAllister's polish helped create the group known as the 'Four Hundred'. Vain, un-democratic, theirs was the gilded age and with their passing went an era to be mourned by few.

Ward McAllister later published his book Society as I found it. Society never forgave McAllister for his literary revelations.

The English Astors who gave the world the Cliveden set are portrayed in all their social glory and spouting hypocrisy. Vincent Astor receives honorable mention in a chapter devoted to the present American branch of the Astor group.

Starting in 1763 and coming down to the present Mr. O'Connor has done a remarkable job in presenting a history of the Astor family. While the book is filled with intimate glances at the social side of the Astor family it must be remembered that it was in the ranks of high society that the female Astors held sway.

New York City produced many characters after the Civil War. Mr. O'Connor has resurrected Joseph Choate, Chauncey Depew, 'Diamond Jim' Brady and Jacob Riis.

New York City from its earliest days to the present is seen through the eyes of the Astor family. Like an immense panorama it all unfolds and gives the reader a delightful picture of people who lived on the 'other side of the railroad tracks'.

Recommended for adults only.

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Paul Gallico. Snow Goose. Alfred A. Knopf. 1941. 58p. $1.00

Paul Gallico's Snow Goose is a simple and moving story woven about a legend connected with the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk in 1940. The style is plain yet the story is beautifully written and much of the descriptive phraseology is extremely attractive.

Philip Rhayder, outcast from human society because of his humped back and clawlike hand, retreats to an abandoned lighthouse in the

Channel marshes where his man-denied love finds expression in feeding the wildfowl which form the subjects of his paintings. One day years before the war, Fritha, young daughter of fisherfolk, overcoming local fear and repugnance brings him an injured Canada snow goose which Philip heals and protects. The goose forms a bond of friendship between child and man but Fritha sees Philip only when it returns from its periodic migrations. Years later when Fritha has grown into womanhood the goose returns permanently and Philip tells Fritha of his love. Driven by repugnance, which she has never completely overcome, Fritha hurries wordlessly away but soon, realizing that she too is in love, returns only to find Philip preparing his sailboat for the trip to Dunkirk.

The goose accompanies Philip cross-channel and stays over him constantly during all the rescue work of transporting men from beaches to ships. Although the very heavens blazed with fare neither the goose nor Philip were touched. It is on this point that the legend is based and the serene, majestic flight of the magnificent white goose so impresses the hard-driven soldiers that wherever the goose is sighted they consider rescue sure. Recrossing the Channel Philip is machinegunned by a Stuka and his boat sunk by a mine. The goose afar circling over the body in a last salute returns to Fritha waiting at the lighthouse. She guesses its message and the bird with a last farewell departs.

The book is suitable for all age and reader levels and is recommended.

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Keith Ayling. R.A.F. H. Holt Co. April 28, 1941. 332p. $2.50

R.A.F. concerns the lives of pilots of the fighting force of Britian whose job it is to keep their enemy from British soil. The story is told by a character called Ken who keeps a journal in his odd moments on the ground. Although the pilots in R.A.F. are the top fighter pilots in the force they do not consider themselves heroes, but the author shows them to be so through their courage, their ability as fighter pilots, and their faith in their planes and their cause. The members of Ken's squadron have, on the whole, rather high moral standards. However, one of Ken's friends who is married has a "girl friend" and another has had an illicit love affair. At times Ken reflects on the horrors of war, not so much the part of it he is in, but the war on the ground, the devastation wrought by bombs, which may eventually get his mother and his girl friend.

Recommended as an adventure story.

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Robert Nathan. They Went On Together. Knopf. April 14, 1941. 191 p. $2.00

This is a simple, beautifully written, short novel about a mother and two children who were forced to flee from their home during the recent invasion of France. The effect of modern warfare on civilians is the theme; Paul and Sylvie, two youngsters of twelve or fourteen, the leading characters; incidents of flight, such as Paul's stuffing of boyish trophies in his pocket, the machine-gunning of refugees, etc., make up the story. It is a pathetic tale, one that needed

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writing. It is recommended for adults and adolescents without qualification.

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Erich Maria Remarque. Flotsam. Little, Brown. April 21, 1941. 436 p. $2.50

With disciplined restraint and deep power, the author of All quiet on the Western Front tells the story of the European exiles, who, because of religion, race or politics, are refused the right to live in most countries of Europe where "the abyss of a passport", a mere scrap of paper, is the device used to separate human beings and cast out some as "flotsam". Denied the right to work the exiles are driven from country to country so that they can truly and pitifully say, "The borders are our home".

The story centers about Ludwig Kern of Jewish paternity whose father had been ruined and exiled so that less efficient competitors could take over his business. Ludwig learns the aptitudes necessary for undercover life from the capable political exile Steiner and eventually after being driven from Austria, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland, Ludwig and Ruth, another racial exile, reach France from which they are able to embark for Mexico.

The catalogue of trials encountered by the refugees is a long and sad one. We do not expect much humor in their lives; the only bits of relief are found in the scenes describing the carrousel and the card game with the Austrian and Swiss customs officers, in both of which the self-reliant and mature Steiner is involved.

The theme is well developed and its handling capable. Were it not for occasional speech vulgarities, the nauseating and semi-realistic description of a miscarriage(p.101-114), the night spent in the house of assignation (prostitution) by Ludwig and Ruth (p.324-6) (which incidentally illustrates well the type of lodging open to exiles), and the complete lack of spiritual hope even where material goals are impossible of achievement, we would recommend it unreservedly. As it stands, Flotsam is adult fare.

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Allis McKay. They Came To A River. Macmillan. April 25, 1941. 651p. $2.75

This is a leisurely, detailed account of a pioneering Washington (Columbia River) community from the time Tom and Josie Velie began an apple orchard in the late 1890's or early 1900's until the railroad became a fixture and cooperative marketing associations were formed. All the simple daily tasks, the minor and major decisions, the interplay of personalities in a small community, are faithfully and simply recorded.

The story of the region develops around the character of Chris Hallowell from her girlhood in a minister's family, through her marriage to Nate Barnes, her widowhood in which she proves herself a capable mother and an excellent business woman, up to her second marriage. In the background is the Columbia River and the development of America's greatest apple-producing region. Details of apple-

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raising and marketing are deftly introduced and never allowed to overburden the story.

Despite the favorable treatment of Dr. Mitchell's attitude toward abortion (p.219-220) and his dissemination of contraceptive information to Chris (p.418)(both incidents are accorded minor mention and Dr. Mitchell is a minor character), we recommend this book to all readers as an exceptionally fine regional novel.

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